

Design Course

Visual Order

Understanding of Visual Design Principles

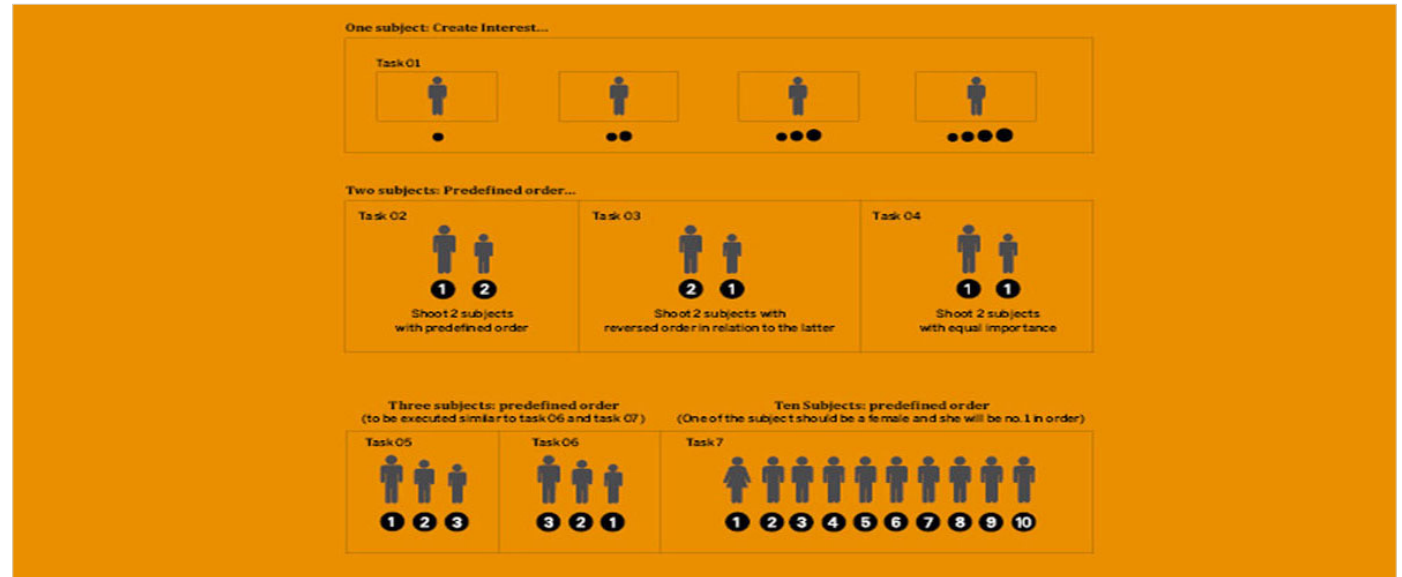
by

Prof. Mandar Rane

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<https://www.dsource.in/course/visual-order>



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[https://www.dsource.in/course/visual-order/
introduction](https://www.dsource.in/course/visual-order/introduction)

Introduction

The Thought:

Assignments in foundation courses of design institutes are commonly criticized as adhering to more of an artistic bent of mind and lack a methodical and scientific approach. This issue continues to be debated and leads to dominance of one kind of approach over the other. Most of the time, the discourse is predominantly about which approach is more effective for modern Graphic Design education, rather than suggesting empirical methods to create newer paradigms of design teaching.

In the pursuit to balance both modes of thinking, (vertical + lateral), this book proposes a method towards criteria based education in Graphic Design. It means design of a teaching method which is goal oriented (to foster vertical thinking), as well as, open-ended; free for exploration (encourage lateral thinking).

The Aim:

The aim of the presentation is not to prove that visual design principles are the basis of all arrangements in a visual space. There are many excellent books which have demonstrated and defined these principles quite elaborately. The attempt is to create a new method which encourages and engages an exploration of visual design principles by performance; to explore arrangements in collaboration with other students rather than in isolation. Isolation here refers to the act of working on the computer in front of the screen, most of the time struggling with the tool instead of focusing on the task.

This presentation aims to encourage students to make conscious design decisions while creating an arrangement. It also aims to instill objectivity and anticipation during creation and to validate the anticipated by testing it with the audience or viewers.

This presentation hopefully makes it evident that all visual decisions made by a graphic designer, while arranging elements (in this case, type/letterforms) within a two dimensional space are not just intuitive and imaginary. In fact, these decisions are also objective, rational and dictated by the need of the message to be communicated. It is on my agenda therefore to create the necessary awareness that if these design decisions are misunderstood then they get labeled as whimsical and irrational, most often by novice designers attempting to discern the principles of visual design.

The objective of this presentation is to introduce a method that encourages collaborative environments for learning, where physical participation, dialogue and involvement with a purpose (task) are of prime concern. This experiment is an attempt to balance the future of design education, namely traditional and modern ideas, through recognizing and associating rational thinking with exploration and creativity.

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The Presentation:

This presentation attempts to explain principles that govern the creation of Visual Order (hierarchy). Visual Order is addressed in the context of relationships between elements which coexist in a two-dimensional space. The objective is to internalize an experience by creating Visual Order; a planned arrangement which allows perception of the desired meaning.

When one meditates, one experiences meditation for the self. This experience of meditation can only be told to someone with help of an analogy. If someone has to experience the experienced, it can only be internalized by doing (i.e. meditating). If 'doing' is bound by limitation of time, then the act is imitated with help of analogies. Analogies help us understand the reality.

Therefore, to begin the process of learning, an experiment was formulated to understand visual design principles through creation of analogies. These analogies were further mapped to actual (real-world) design tasks through comparisons and discussions that were initiated by the instructor. The experiment was conducted over a span of four to five years across various design institutes and has manifested itself into a teaching method documented in this presentation titled, Visual Order.



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Visual Order - Part-1



Elements come together in a space, interact with the space to create an arrangement. All arrangements create forms.



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The picture of the elephant god Ganesha's procession has elements arranged along a linear path. It directs the attention of the viewer- person viewing the picture, along an invisible guideline captured by the photographer. The child looks at the idol of Lord Ganesh and the line of sight travels up, pointing to the people on the top of the terrace building, watching the procession.

It's the ability of the photographer to see this composition/arrangement and freeze the moment to create a memorable picture; an arrangement captured through the lens of the camera by the intelligent eye of the photographer. Here, he is able to see a 'visual order'.



Tool versus The Task!

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Analog versus Digital:

With new tools for execution, maximum effort is spent on understanding/ struggling with the tool rather than involving oneself in the depths of the task. The task as a result, only goes as far as the novice's knowledge about the tool. Therefore, one can say that the objective of the task is dictated by the tool, resulting in limited exploration and distorted learning.

Having understood the problem in all these aspects, the challenge was to come up with a teaching method that not only allows freedom to explore, but also helps validate this freedom with objectivity and rationality.



About the Method:

In this course Visual Order, students attempt visual solutions to a given set of task based questionnaire (Task sheet). The visual solutions created by the students form analogies to explain design decisions which dictate arrangement of elements in visual design. This slide displays the assignment format that describes each task the students have to perform, step by step.

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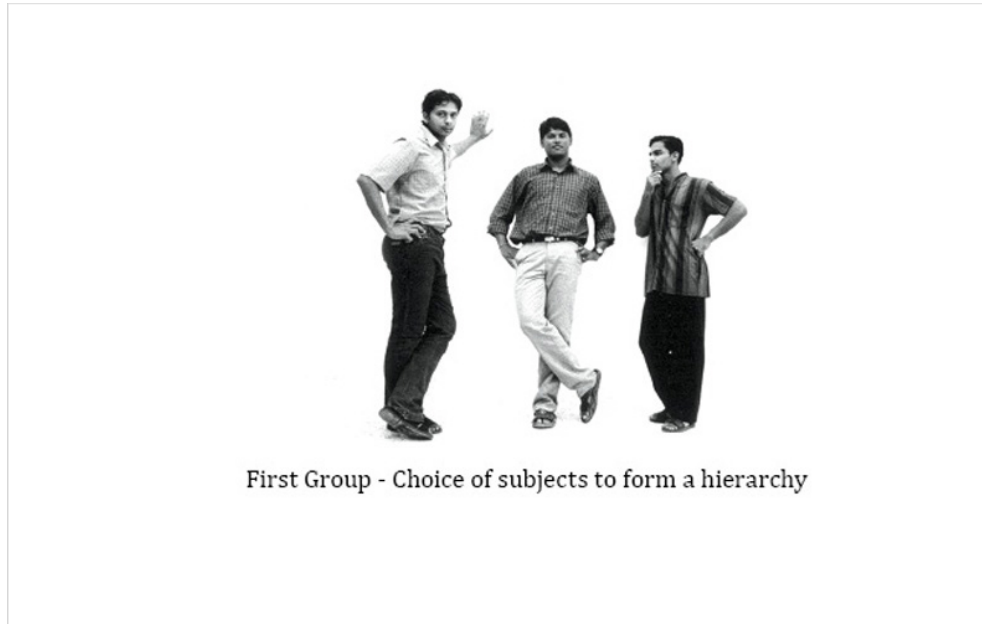
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The picture is one of the task (visual solution) performed by the students. As we proceed we will discuss the assignment in detail.



First Group - Choice of subjects to form a hierarchy

Choice of Subjects:

For the experiment, we choose three students from the class. This slide displays the group of chosen students who will participate as subjects to execute the given tasks (questionnaire). These students should form an obvious visual hierarchy, i.e., the height of the subjects should increase or decrease gradually, when they stand together. That is one obviously taller than the next. Physically the difference amongst the subjects should be obvious, but not too stark. Choice of subjects with stark differences should be avoided as one particular subject might become unique. This has to be strictly adhered to, while choosing the subjects.

For the tasks which we conducted we chose two groups with three students in each group. On this slide is the first group and on the next slide is the second group of students who participated in the experiment.

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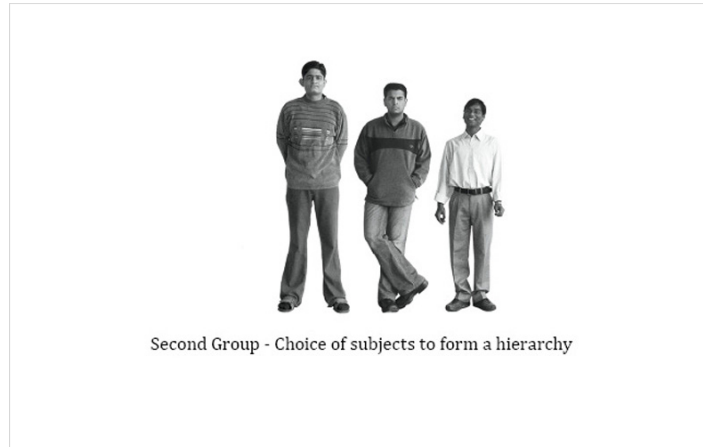
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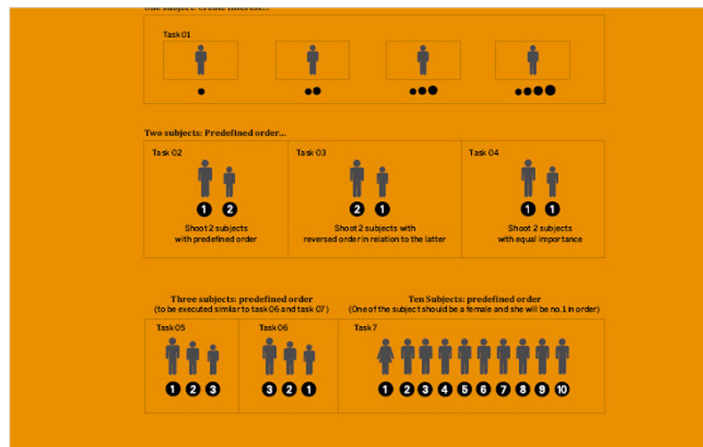
First Group - Rahul, Kshitij & Navendu (left - right)



Second Group - Choice of subjects to form a hierarchy

Presented here is the second group of students with an obvious visual hierarchy.

Second Group: Abhishek, Manshu, Dinesh (left to right)



Task Sheet - Visual Questionnaire:

Once the subjects were decided, rest of the class is given a task sheet as shown on the right hand page. The class will shoot black and white pictures of the chosen subjects as per the task defined in the task sheet. These pictures have to be shot against an empty background (this is compulsory). To shoot the pictures a digital camera should be used and the preview on the screen should be set to black and white.

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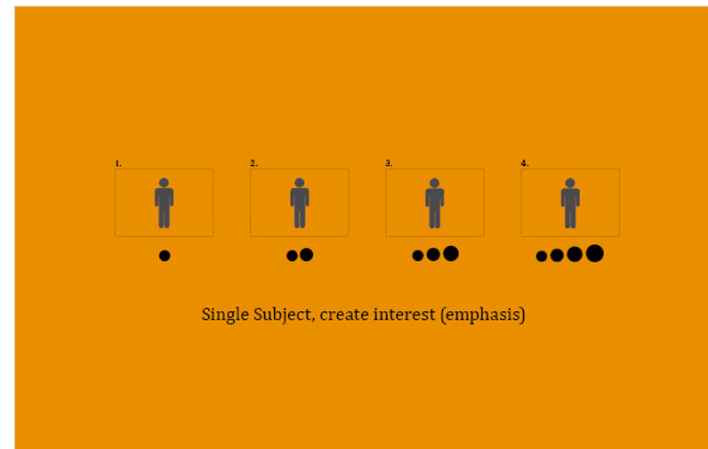
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Each task will be Explained as We Proceed Further:



For this task, Task 01, you can choose any one subject out of the three from group one.

Task 01:

In this task we shoot four black and white pictures of a single subject in a pre-defined format (landscape) against an empty background. Shoot these four photographs with incremental interest. It means that when all four pictures of the chosen subject are shot and displayed together- each picture should be more interesting than the previous one. That is the fourth picture should be more interesting than the third one, the third picture more interesting than the second one and the second picture more interesting than the first one when validated against the opinion of a viewer or an audience.

Points to Remember:

- The background of the subject while shooting the picture should be empty or white.
- Clothing should be neutral and non-trendy.
- Clothing should not overpower the subject or distract attention.
- Ideally, Black or Grey coloured T-shirts could be used.
- There should be no printed text/imagery on the clothes.
- The subjects can be either male or female and not a mix of both.
- No props are allowed.

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Further pages will display a series of images with increasing emphasis.

Single Subject, create interest (emphasis)



This is the first picture where the subject stands still in the center of the picture frame. As per the criteria mentioned in the task sheet, the next picture should be more interesting than the current. What does the next picture in an increasing order of interest look like? You shall find out on the next slide.



The second picture displays a gesture by the subject carefully listening to something. The change in posture adds a little interest.

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What about the third picture?



The third picture adds more dynamism as the subject tries to attempt a dancing posture to achieve the criteria of increasing interest.



In the fourth and the last picture the subject is brought closer to the camera to display astonishment and excitement.

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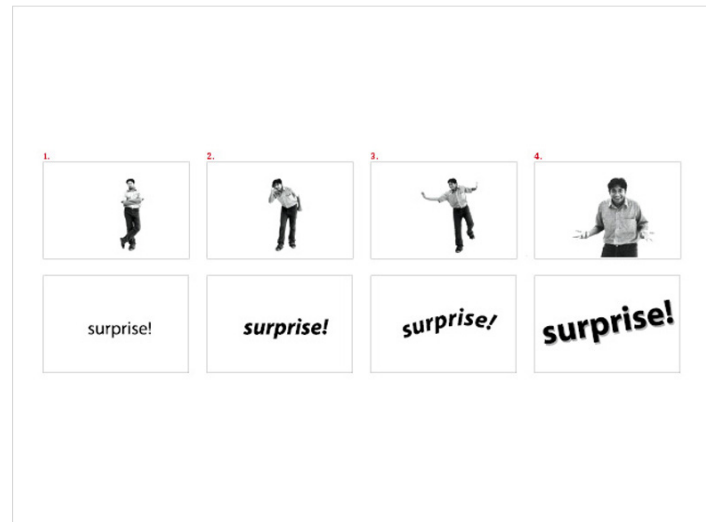
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These four pictures were rationalized by comparing the subject to a written word. Typographic solutions were worked out for each frame by the instructor to explain how pictures are translated into typographic expressions for easy comprehension.

In the first picture, as the subject has a personality, character and an identity; a font also behaves in a similar fashion with individuality, a character of its own, displaying its unique identity from a family of typeface.

The second picture is compared to changing of the text to italic to add a little gesture and dynamism.

In the third picture the element of fun and expression from the subject is translated into the font.

In the fourth and the last picture the subject is compared with increase in font size, trying to attract more attention by scale/increase in size.

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This teaching method of Visual Order was experimented across various design institutes in the country. Presented here are a few examples of the results of students work at these institutes.

Task:

The act was similar as Task01; to shoot pictures of a single subject in an increasing order of interest and design typographic translations for the same. In this case the number of pictures was reduced to three instead of four.

In the task, what do we mean by a typographic translation?

A typographic translation is to create an equivalent of the subject's picture with the help of type as a medium for expression. That is creating an arrangement of type in a given space comparable to the subject picture that was shot. We translate the contents of the picture frame into a typography.

What needs to be translated?

There are primarily three things that we are required to translate.

1. Content (subject) = What is written. (In this case, the name of the subject, choice of font)
2. Space and content interaction = Resulting in proportion. (Scale, emphasis)
3. Expression of the Content (subject) = Expressing emotion through type

This slide displays the first picture in the series of three (again in incremental interest), followed its typographic translation on the next slide.

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Typographic variables are explored to create picture equivalent, typographic translation of the picture on the previous slide.



Second picture in the series. Appropriateness of the picture validated against the criteria of incremental interest.

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Typographic translation for the second picture.



Third picture in the series.

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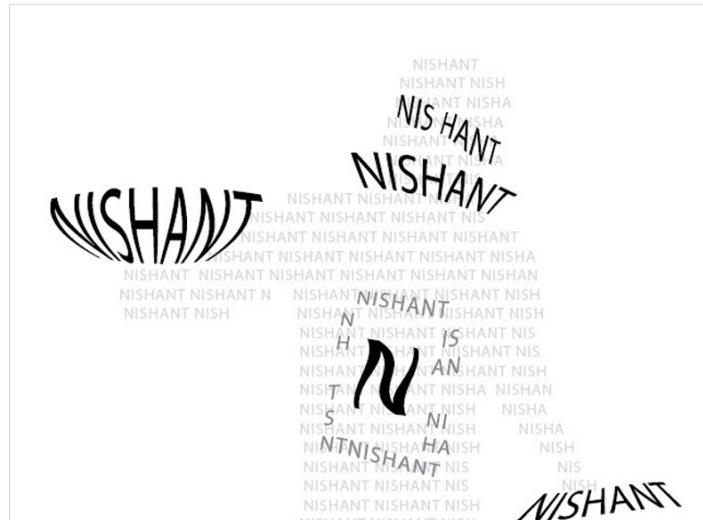
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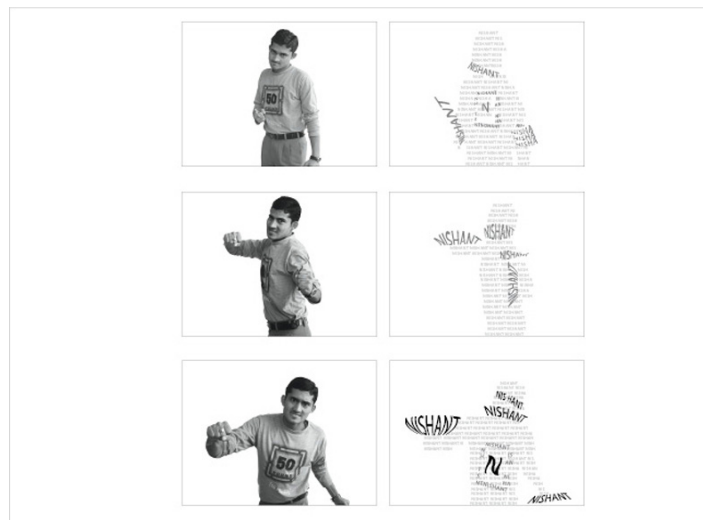
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Typographic translation for the third picture.



An overview of all three pictures and their typographic translations. Typographic expression corresponding to the pictures is attempted and rightly achieved.

Students explore the typographic variables, scale and value in a given space objectively. Picture becomes a reference to review the typographic attempt. There are numerous ways to execute the picture-equivalent typograph-

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ic translation. Each and every approach is considered valid and encouraged in this method. So, the resultant is never a single right answer to this task, this makes the task exploratory. This exploration is objective since it is validated against the three points mentioned in the criteria.

1. Content
2. Content + space interaction
3. Content + expression

On the next slide we will see one more example, where the same task is executed with another subject.



A similar task was executed by another student by shooting a series of pictures and creating corresponding typographic translations, equivalent to the subject pictures.

This slide shows the first picture of the subject, in the series. Task is the same as earlier; to shoot three consecutive pictures with increasing levels of interest.

Typographic translation for the same will follow on the next page.

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The subject uses a short form of his first name, “Sid-dharth”, as “Sid” to create the appropriate typographic translation.



Here's the second picture in the series.



Typographic translation for the second picture.



Third picture in the series.

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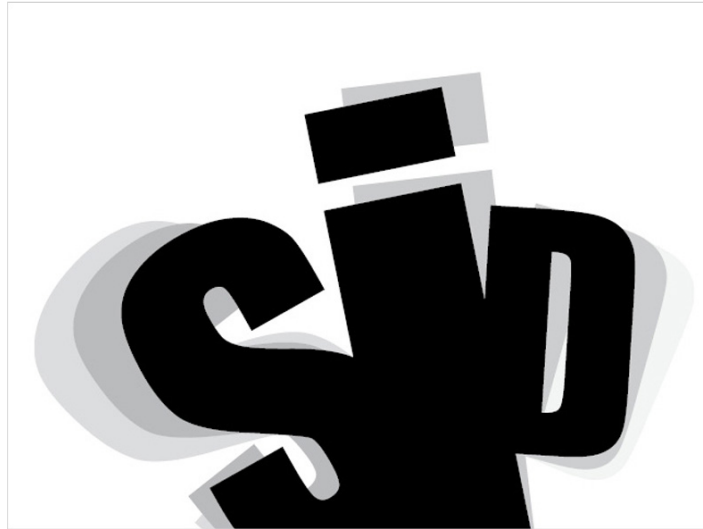
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Typographic translation for the third picture.



The typographic translation done by the student is quite different from the earlier. Here he does not attempt to trace the exact outline to create a silhouette of the figure. The student plays with the letter-forms as a mass of object to imitate the qualities of the picture.

This slide displays all the three pictures and their typographic translations with reference to the pictures shot. At

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the end of these tasks students understood the act of expressing the required gesture through font as a medium for the message. The message here is typographic translations keeping in mind three factors- firstly the content, secondly the interaction between the empty space and the content and thirdly the expression of the subject. Students were able to comprehend the relationship of all three and validate the same against the picture to rationalize the typographic decisions.



What do we conclude from these tasks?

It is easy for the viewer to focus on a single element in a given space since there is nothing else to look at.

But, this does not mean we create a flat or a bland solution. A single element in a given space can also be treated interestingly. Next slide shows an interesting composition of the same subject.

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Interesting composition with a single element in a given space.

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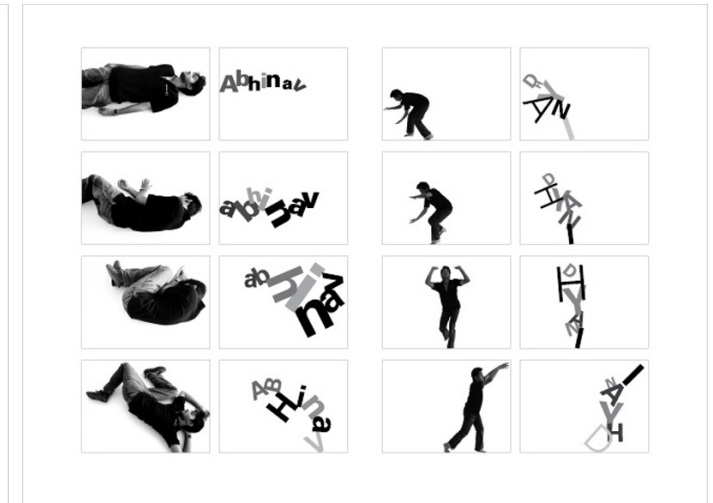
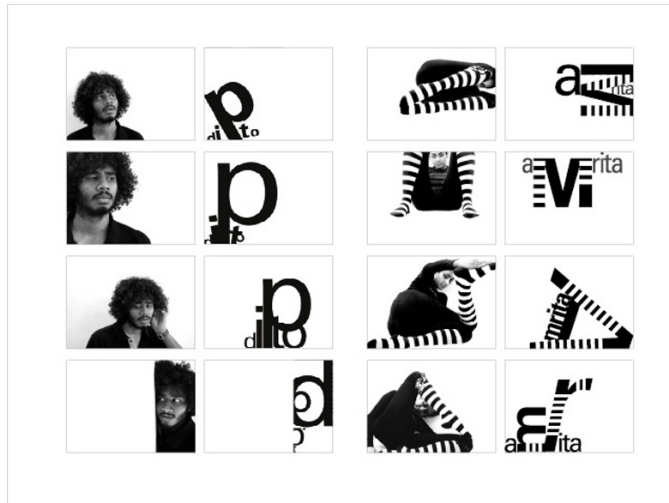
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Visual Order - Part-2



From this section we begin the second task, now the number of elements (subjects) in a given space has increased. This slide has two subjects with numbers below them, 1 and 2 indicating the order of visual preference, in which their photographs should be shot as well as be perceived by the viewer after the shoot.



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The subjects we chose for this task are from amongst the first group of students. We have two subjects, Rahul and Navendu whose pictures need to be shot for this exercise.

By this we mean that when a picture of these two subjects is taken with a digital camera against a white background, for a viewer looking at the photograph Rahul should stand out first followed by Navendu.



Students fulfilled the criteria. The only problem in the solution was that, it is an obvious solution. If you hide the face of the second subject naturally the first subject would gain more importance. This does not mean that the solution is wrong, but better options can be attempted. A creative solution would be one where a picture is created without hiding the face of the second subject. In these pictures face is the identity (attention grabbing area), in comparison to the rest of the body. This identity and the arrangement of the subjects dictates the sequence of the visual order.

It requires a mention that the subjects in the picture should be unknown to the viewer, prior to his judgment that is validation regarding the appropriateness of the created/ required visual order.

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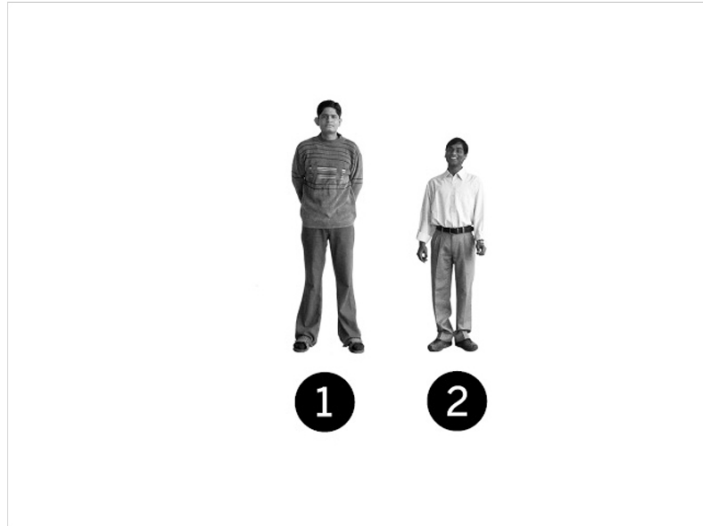
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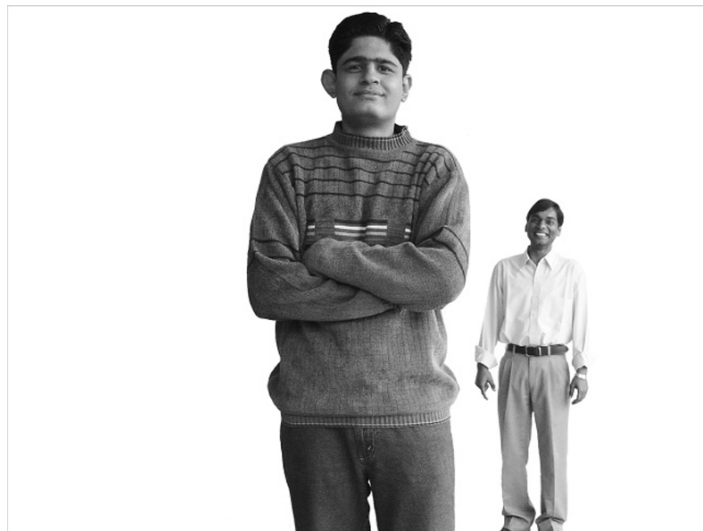
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Shoot a picture in such a manner that the taller guy is perceived prior to the shorter guy when the picture is presented to the viewer. Let's see how the second group fares with the Task 02.



Interesting solution! The subject who was supposed to be No.1 in visual order is brought forward and the second subject is sent behind. This is an act of conscious arrangement to attain a predefined objective.

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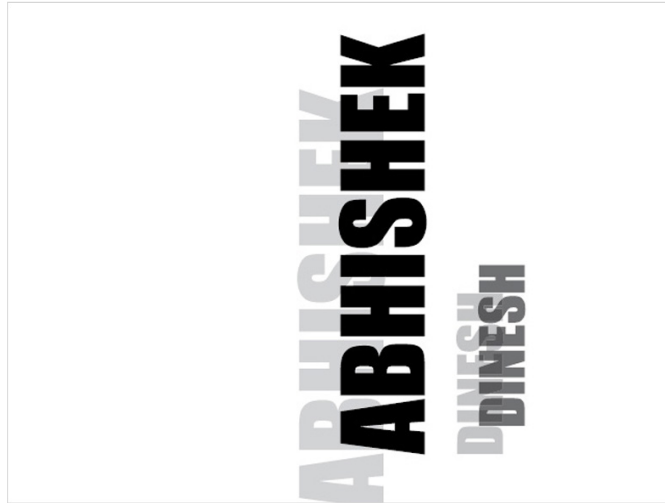
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On second thoughts, there seems to be a little ambiguity in this solution and the preference may tend towards the second subject to be perceived first, due to the smile on his face.



Typographic translation for the same solution. It fulfills the criteria of the first subject (Abhishek) to be seen first and the second subject (Dinesh) later in visual order.



Due to slight ambiguity in the earlier picture, the solution was redone. Still it fails because the tilt in the head of the second subject creates interest or attracts 'attention'. Let's see the typographic translation for the picture on the next slide.

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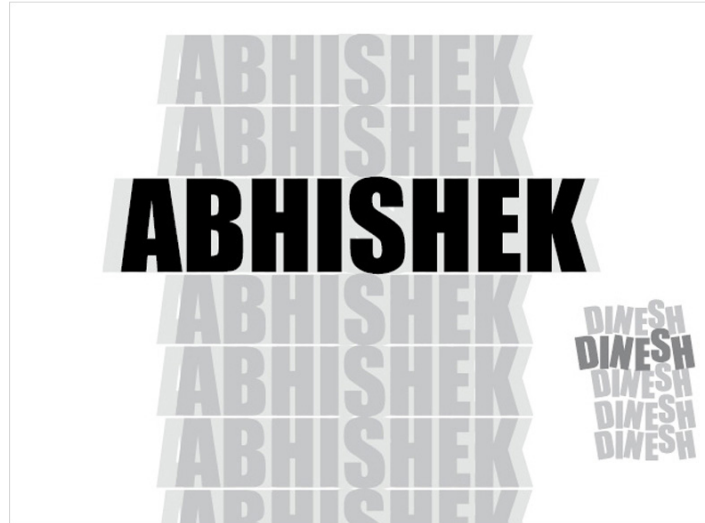
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Interesting treatment of typography to create different weights. The tilt of the head is translated with change in orientation of the letter forms (for the second subject, i.e. Dinesh).

It fulfills the criteria that Abhishek should be seen first and Dinesh later. The result seems quite good as it met the required criteria.



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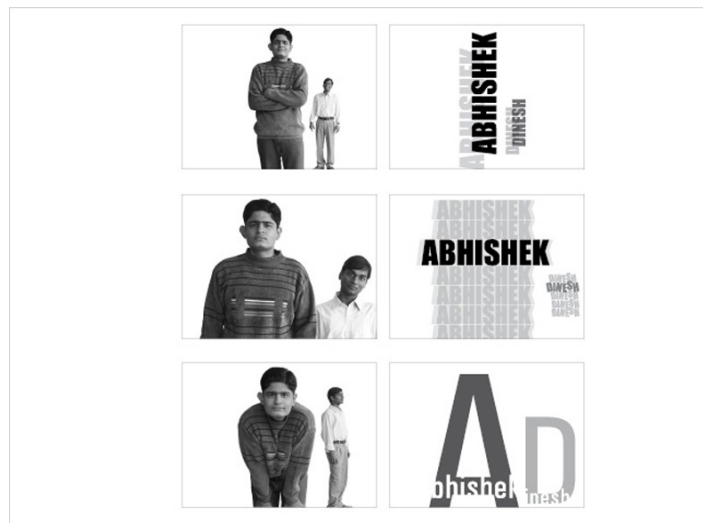
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The third picture in the series is our perfect solution to the given visual problem. Subject No.1 is brought forward, nearer to the lens of the camera to increase his importance and the second subject is pushed behind with nil expression/gesture to make him appear secondary in the visual order.



This is a clever typographic translation. It attracts attention by highlighting the initial letters of the names respective subjects. The larger letterforms with different values are used to balance the visual weight of the subjects with reference to the picture.



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All three pictures with their typographic translations. If we compare all the three solutions we can conclude that the idea is not to find just one solution, sufficient to fulfill the criteria of the given problem, but to develop a habit of generating multiple alternatives for the same problem.

In other words, the search is not for the right answer, but for a better answer.



In this section we begin with the third task. The visual order in this case is reversed, exactly opposite of what we were supposed to do in the earlier task.

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The pictures of the subject with the numerals below them define the visual order. Shoot a picture such that the weaker subject (shorter) has to be No.1 and the stronger subject (taller) has to be No.2 in the visual order perceived by the viewer.



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The picture shot by the students seems to meet the required criteria. The weaker subject (right) due to his strong gesture dominates the scene and elevates himself to the number one position in the visual order by attracting attention. When the picture was validated with viewers, the weaker subject was the most preferred, and a few viewers who felt sorry for the other subject chose him for his sorry state.

This resulted in a situation where the solution was ambiguous. A consciously designed arrangement could not be left to ambiguity. Could we alter the solution in such a manner that all the viewers would vote for their visual preference of the weaker subject in accordance with the given criteria for the task?



A change in the background dictates what is to be seen first. Using a principle of design 'radiation' we could define the Visual Order and reduce ambiguity. Now all the viewers voted for the subject with the angry gesture, followed by the preference for the second subject.

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Information can be informative or persuasive. It depends upon the context in which the message has to be communicated. A little modification in the radiating lines can add a little persuasion (attraction/interest).



We have a tremendous control when we design, even to the extent of reversing the Visual Order. Therefore, the act of design is planned, conscious and objective.

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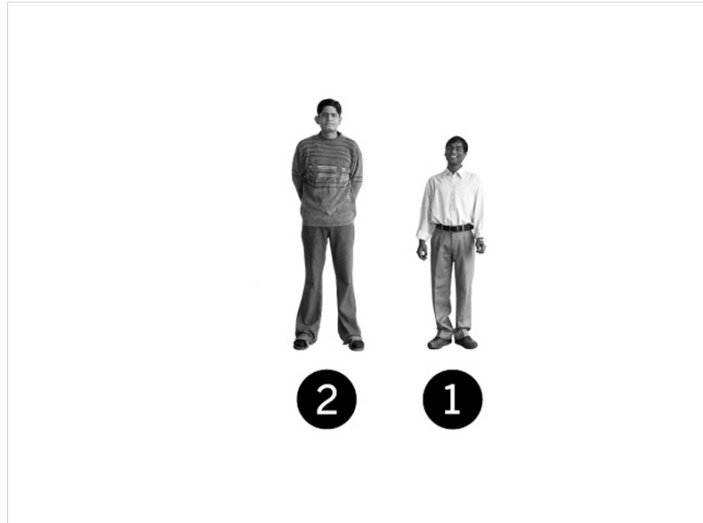
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Let's see how the other group performs the same task.



Dinesh (left) gets preference because of the strong expressive facial gesture of being choked up. Apart from creating the required Visual Order the group has also added a story into the picture. The story binds the two subjects together.

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Type expresses an emotion. Dinesh is prioritized in Visual Order due to value, scale orientation and position. An example of expressive typography; expresses the choking of name, 'Dinesh' with reference to the shot picture.



One more picture performing the same task, weaker subject to be No.1 in visual order

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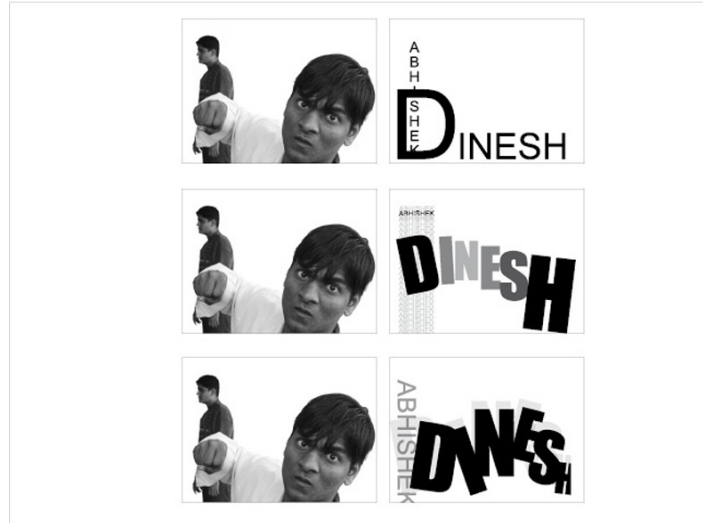
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Three students render different typographic translations for the same picture. If we compare all three typographical translations, the first typographic solution fulfills the criteria of the word Dinesh to be seen first, but lacks the aggression in the font as seen in the picture.

Whereas the last typographic translation, adjacent to the third picture reflects expression and aggression of the subject through the font.

Imagine the difficulty an instructor would face to explain aggression in a font without the reference of the pictures.

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A picture expressing visual order with two subjects. We can dictate the order by prioritizing which subject is to be highlighted or should draw attention.

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Create visual order for two subjects with equal visual preference.

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Task 04:

was to create equal importance. Equal importance means, none of the two subjects shown aside should have prominence over each other. In other words, a viewer should perceive both the subjects as a group or as a whole entity.

The viewer should either vote his visual preference for both the subjects or for none of them. The preference should be biased to either of them or else the required criteria of creating equal importance for both would fail. In this task we purposely chose a weak and a strong subject to make the task challenging.

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This was their solution, they tried to achieve uniformity with similar gestures but failed to meet the criteria of equal importance for both the subjects. The viewers either preferred the left or the right subject. The task failed.



Two subjects standing apart from each other, created distinct spatial differences and the arrangement encouraged creation of separate identities. Students were told that if they had brought the subjects closer then it could have dissolved their individual identities.

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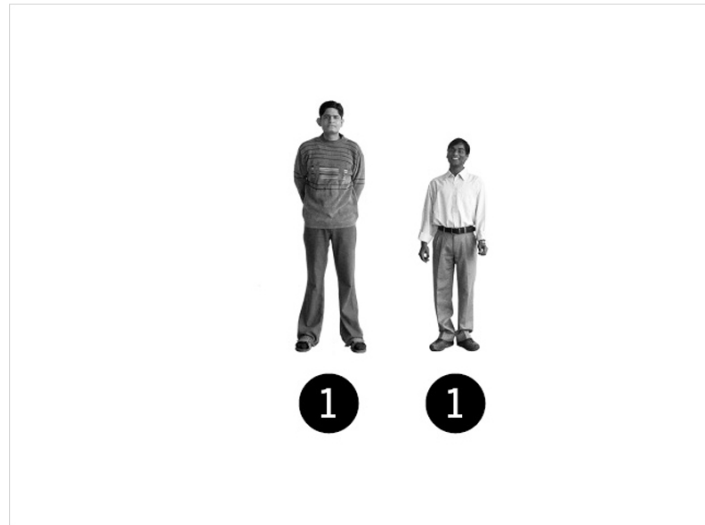
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Same task with the other group.



A good solution! But still the subjects do not form a group or a whole. They appear as separate entities.

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Let's bring the subjects closer to each other and overlap them. Distance (Proximity) is a very sensitive and crucial variable to make or break groups.

Read more about this by referring to Gestalt laws.



We revise the difference in height to create similarity and dissolve prominence to create equal importance.

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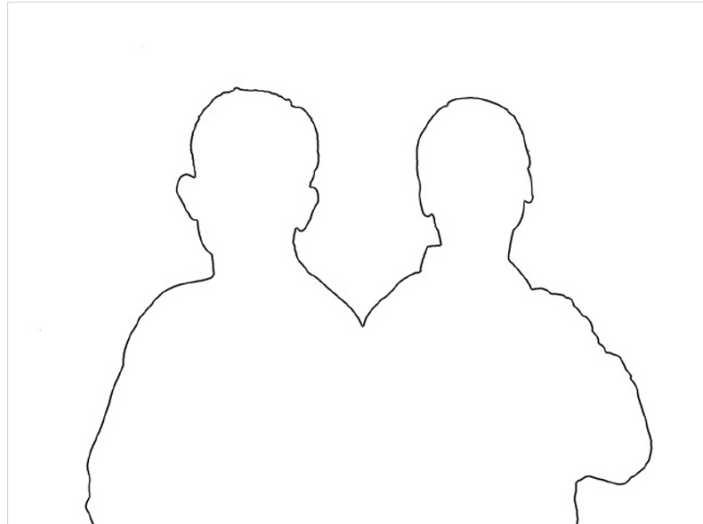
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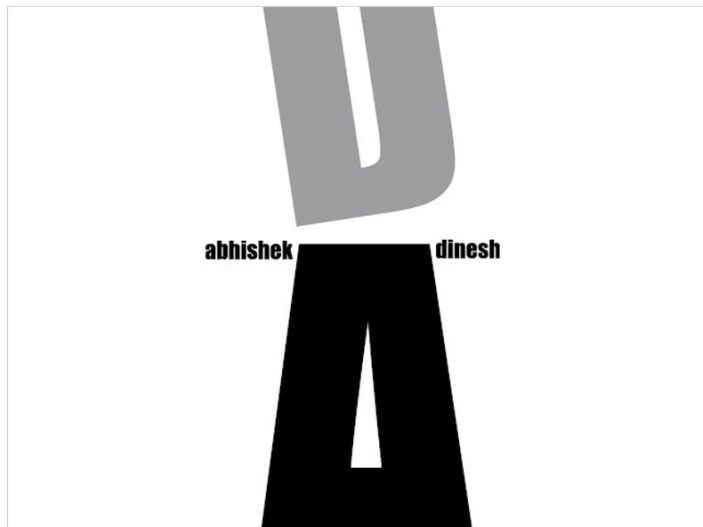
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Earlier, both subjects were identified as two separate entities. Overlapping the two subjects created a single contour for them to form a group.



Typographic translation for the pictures shot by the students. Subjects were substituted by names of the students. The criteria was the same, neither of the names should have preference over each other. Both the names can be neutral in preference. In the current solution the word 'Abhishek' on the left is read first. This does not meet our criteria of equal importance.

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One more solution but still it fails. Reading direction and position will always affect the order of preference for the written word.

Even if we had place the words aligned left to begin from the same position, either of the word will be placed at the top or the bottom. The word at the top would get preference because of our habit of reading from top to bottom and left to right. Students were stuck! How does one create equal importance? At first glance the design solution seems impossible, until it gets resolved.

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[illegible]

One more attempt fails, because similarity creates groups. When groups are created there will obviously be preference.

Either, or.

inesh Abhishek Dinesh Abhishek Dinesh Abhishek Dinesh
esh Abhishek Dinesh Abhishek Dinesh Abhishek Dinesh A
ek Dinesh Abhishek Dinesh Abhishek Dinesh Abhishek Di
hishek Dinesh Abhishek Dinesh Abhishek Dinesh Abhishe
inesh Abhishek Dinesh Abhishek Dinesh Abhishek Dinesh
bhishek Dinesh Abhishek Dinesh Abhishek Dinesh Abhis
ek Dinesh Abhishek Dinesh Abhishek Dinesh Abhishek D
inesh Abhishek Dinesh Abhishek Dinesh Abhishek Dinesh
esh Abhishek Dinesh Abhishek Dinesh Abhishek Dinesh A
ek Dinesh Abhishek Dinesh Abhishek Dinesh Abhishek Di
hishek Dinesh Abhishek Dinesh Abhishek Dinesh Abhishe
ek Dinesh Abhishek Dinesh Abhishek Dinesh Abhishek Di
bhishek Dinesh Abhishek Dinesh Abhishek Dinesh Abhis
hishek Dinesh Abhishek Dinesh Abhishek Dinesh Abhishe
inesh Abhishek Dinesh Abhishek Dinesh Abhishek Dinesh

Finally the solution works because it creates ambiguity for the viewer regarding which word should get preference, resulting in a perception of the whole or a mass. Students comprehend the idea of dissolving identities with a conscious attempt to achieve, lack of similarity.

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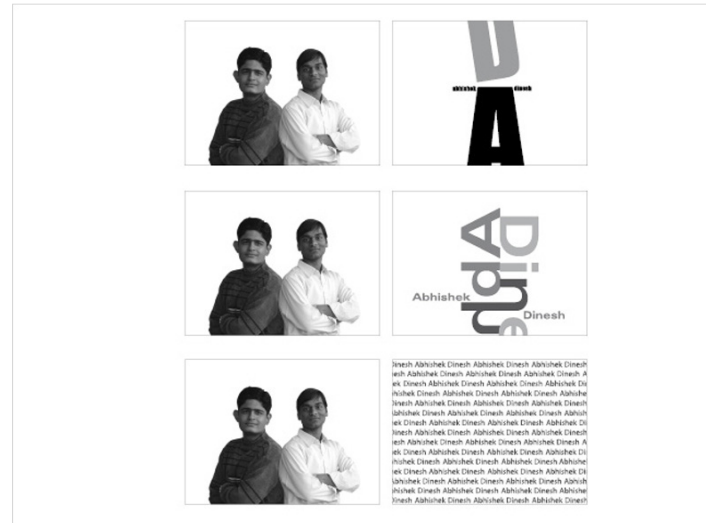
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All three attempts together reflect the process of trying to achieve the most appropriate solution. This clearly reflects objectivity and exploration can go hand in hand.

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The background of the adjacent picture acts similar to that of the words, Abhishek and Dinesh in the previous typographic solution. Neither of them shouts (demands attention). The same idea is explained through a photograph. Since the background is overexposed (out of focus) keeping the subject in focus. Attention is directed towards the subjects rather than the background.

“The background stands out”. Such are the words used by design instructors attempting to explain the visual design principles to the students. On the face of it, such comments appear irrational, but underneath lies a strong rational, which Visual Order (as a method of teaching) attempts to explain through this photograph.

Look at the third part to view the creation of visual order as the number of subjects increases to more than two.

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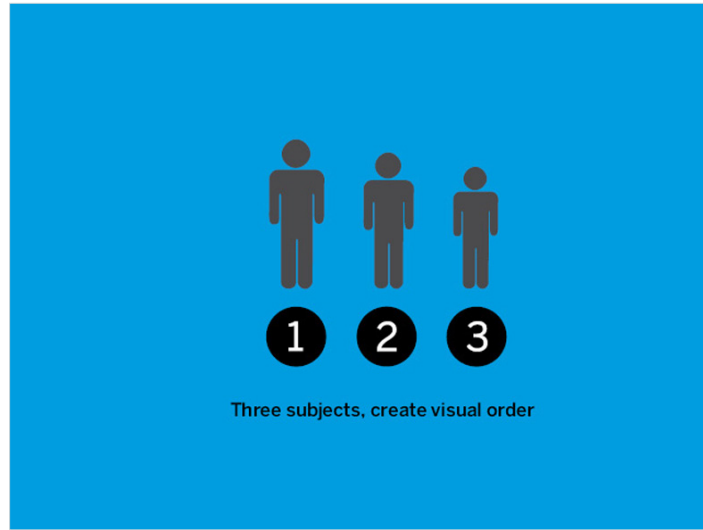
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Visual Order - Part-3



- Create Visual Order for subjects 1, 2 and 3.



Subjects:

Rahul, Kshitij and Navendu (left to right). Shoot pictures of these three subjects such that the required *Visual Order* is created.

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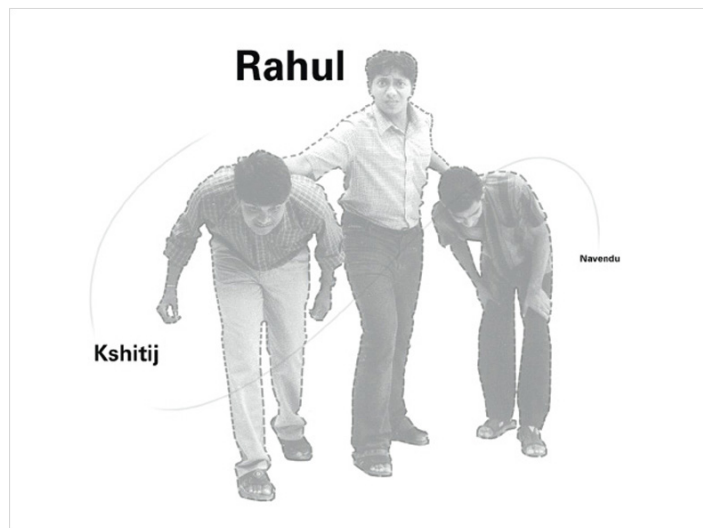
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Good solution!

The subject in the center holding the other two creates a visual flow. Subject on the left slightly looks up to become no. 2 and the third subject almost hiding its face to step down at No. 3.



The task illustrates visual flow in graphic design. It tells us how it can lead a viewer through a pre-defined/ pre-designed visual order. The typographic variable 'scale' and the subjects holding each other combine together to create an arrangement, which creates a visual flow.

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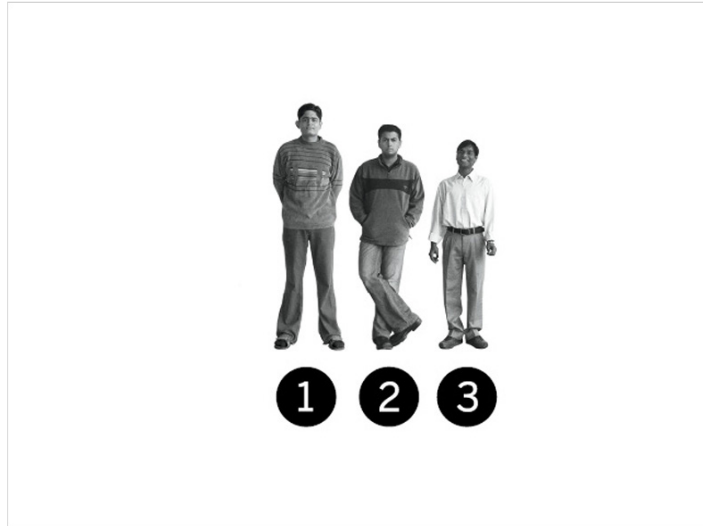
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- Same task to be performed with the second group.



Solution does not work. Attention of the viewer is pulled in varying directions. Viewer has a choice to choose either of the subjects and impose his own order. The visual priority in the task is ignored. Solution does not meet the required criteria.

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Solution with higher order. Highly functional and orderly. For example, a telephone directory with an alphabetical listing. Solution meets the given criteria but more options could be explored.



Empty space plays an important role in deciding the visual order. This white or empty space interacts with the content. A graphic designer should be extremely sensitive about space. He should train his eyes to see this space (to be able to see the void). On the right is an example to study the addition of white space. It helps to bring more attention to our subject on the left.

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Addition of white space from the right changes the visual order. The subject on the right becomes no.1 in visual order due to the white space as well as he is shifted to the center, in spite of him being smaller in size.



Earlier solutions were obvious, therefore students repeat the task. This solution however fails to achieve the desired visual order. If the second subject (on the extreme left) had been facing towards the camera then the desired Visual Order could have been achieved.

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One more solution, but the attention is captured by the central part of the gesture as a whole, creating a group of the first two subjects (from the right). Students will have to revise the solution to make it better. Let's turn over to see the next attempt by the students.



Now the solution works, it suffices the predefined criteria of the visual order and also has a story involved into it. The subject (from the right) looks at us (into the camera) to attract our attention first, The hand holding the head guides our visual path further towards the second subject and finally descending down to the third.

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A plain monotonous, flat, typographic solution fulfils the required criteria, but, we need something more than the obvious.



This solution is interesting, creative but a little ambiguous, also readability seems a problem here.

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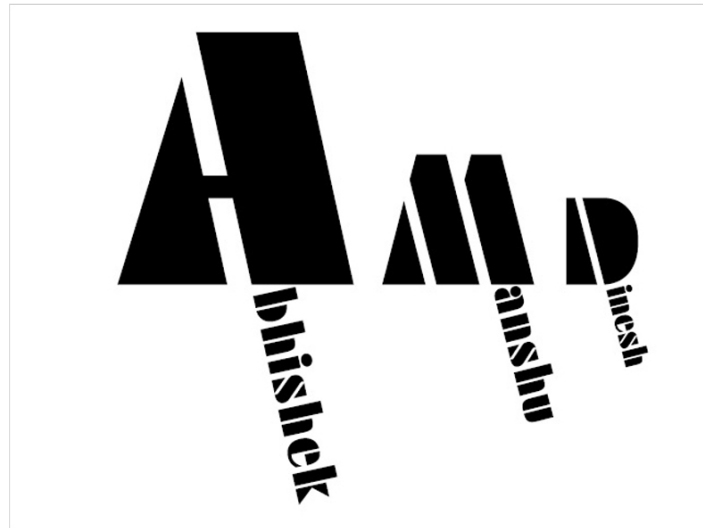
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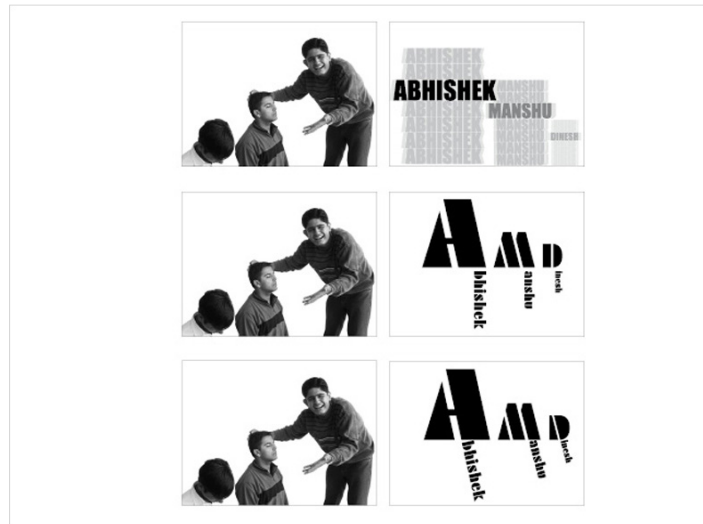
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A little tweaking solves the problem, now the solution is functional as well as interesting.



All the three solutions are presented together here. When we compare all three typographic solutions we can conclude that the first one is not wrong, but the third one is correct as well as interesting. We attempt to seek more solutions in graphic design rather than a single perfect answer.

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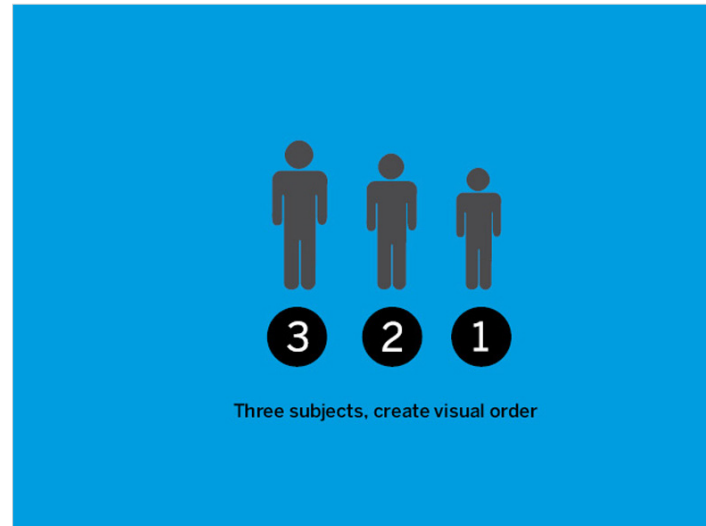
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Three subjects, reverse order.



Pictures of the three subjects. The weaker subject (from the right) should be perceived as No.1 in visual order. A tough task!

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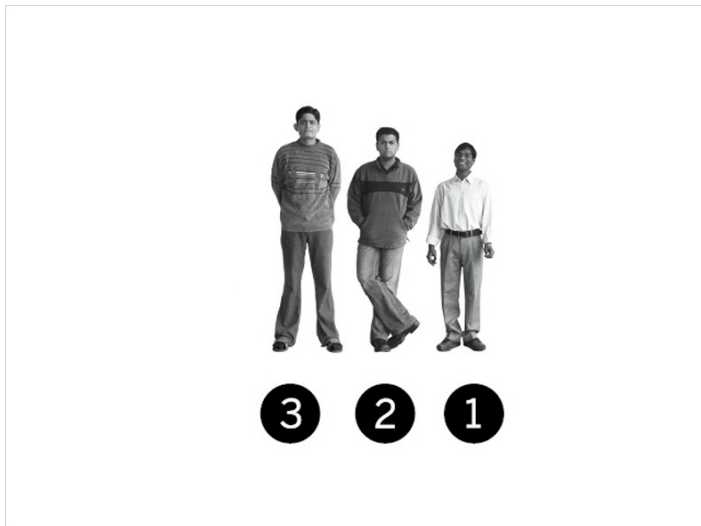
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A gesture, orientation or posture of the more attractive subject can be compared to an unusual or a dominant element in a typographic layout. A bold font face and increase in font size attracts and captures more attention in comparison to other elements.



Same task with the second group. The weaker subject (on the right) should be perceived as No.1 in visual order.

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A successful attempt. It fulfills the criteria and creates the required order, plus has a story built into it which explains the effective use of persuasion to create interest and presents the result; an inviting communication.



Tight cropping of the photograph enhances the solution. It deletes the unnecessary, prioritizes by focusing on the required.

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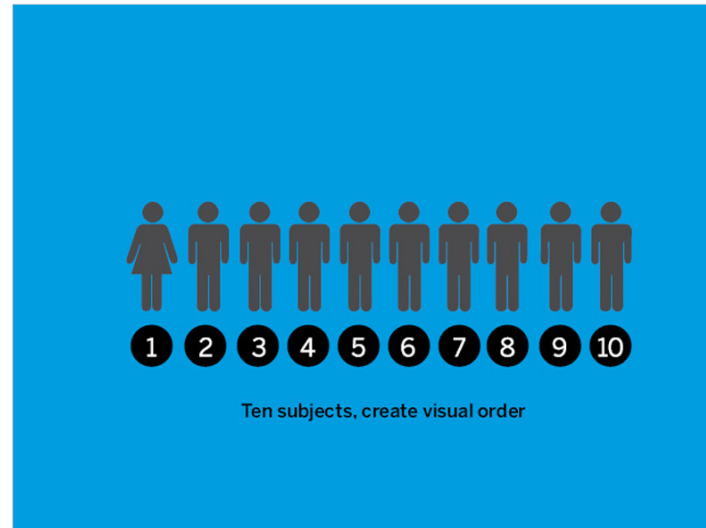
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Visual order with ten subjects.



The number of subjects is increased to ten. Amongst the ten a female subject is introduced. Prior to the execution of Task 07 the predefined order in which the subjects should be shot is decided. (See the picture on the right). This picture will serve as a proof to whether the required Visual Order is achieved.

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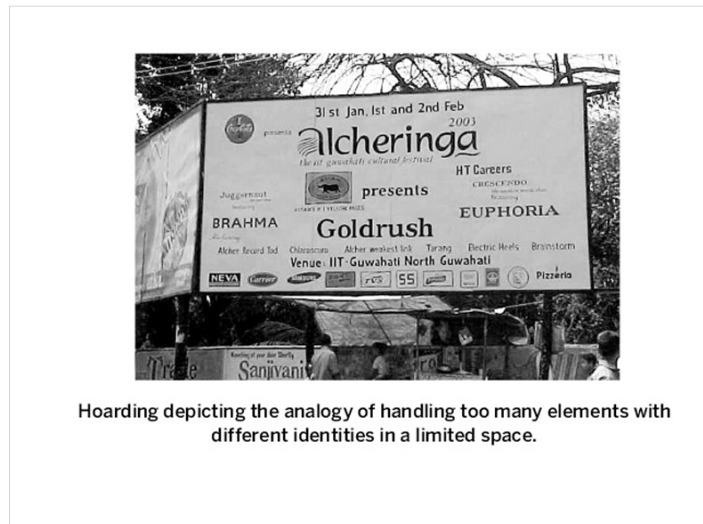
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Students comprehend the trouble of defining a visual order with too many elements in a limited space. Solution fails.



Hoarding depicting the analogy of handling too many elements with different identities in a limited space.

Notice the typographic resemblance to the analogy of increasing subjects within a limited space on a billboard (in the city of Guwahati; State of Assam, India). This example helps the students internalize, the concept of lack of Visual Order in visual design solutions. The struggle to handle too many elements in a given space and the disturbance in perceiving a clear *visual order* creates clutter/chaos.

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A few picture based analogies to reinforce the concept of Visual Order. Within a given set of information we can impose upon the viewer the decision of where to look first.



Therefore, design of information, a layout, a brochure or an advertisement is a story-telling exercise. It should be told in an interesting and an intriguing manner. It should involve the reader, carry him through a sequence and take him through the events on the page. The information should not overwhelm the viewer, creating in him a fear of being lost.

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Information can be static as well as interactive. Interactive information can be compared to a stage performance where the visual order of the subjects keeps on changing. When one subject is moving forward to be a performer (be No.1), others rearrange themselves to become 2, 3 or 4; We can term it as dynamic visual order; governed by conscious planning of the dance sequence; well executed by the dancers; under the direction of a skilled director.

Similarly, a graphic designer is the director of the elements in a given space (page).

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Till now we were only dealing with black & white pictures. In this picture the person in white shirt attracts our attention. Let's see on the next page what happens if we introduce colour.

Can colour impose a Visual Order?



Colour is a very powerful variable of design. If used properly it can attract as well as distract the attention of a viewer. Excessive use of colour can create multiple hierarchies. Colour is a variable to be used responsibly.

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In these assignments with subjects as elements, face of the person becomes an identity to attract attention or dictate a visual order.

Similarly in an advertisement or a layout the written text, its meaning and photographs are the identities of that presented information. The viewer browses through these elements to comprehend the communicable message. **A planned arrangement of these elements dictates the pattern of browsing.**

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If you don't see a face we can term that the information is flat. There is no importance given (not highlighted) to any element. All the information is at the same level with absence of hierarchy.



In real life, we find examples of visual order. The boy in the picture decorates himself artificially to attract attention in the crowd of people. Similarly, a graphic designer highlights a single element (to grab attention first) in a composition; before the viewer's attention goes to other elements in the same composition (crowd).

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At times people decorate themselves to the extent that you are forced to look at them. If the person in the adjacent picture does not decorate himself in such a manner it would be difficult for him to make a living. With such high visual order (decoration for a single element) he makes sure that gets his alms by standing out in the crowd. It is less likely that people would overlook him.

The struggle is to grab attention of the inattentive.



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When the number of elements increase *Visual Order* becomes much more critical. The element which is most prominent, that is first in visual order should interact with other elements rather than isolating itself by domination, taking away attention from others.



Therefore, the element which is first in visual order should make friends (build relationships between elements) with others to create a visual flow and lead the viewer through the information.



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When the number of elements increase visual order/ hierarchy becomes much more critical, otherwise everyone asks/ shouts for attention. Clutter is a result of inability of the designer to handle increasing number of elements in a limited space.



So, we need to design solutions which are holistic. It should persuade the viewer so he is attracted/ interested (remember it is also content dependent) to read through the content; designer should create the required visual order.

What is a good arrangement? Understanding the content and mapping the required visual order to the targeted viewer through careful planning and conscious arrangement.

Good arrangements result from the act of designing in such a manner that all elements interact with each other to complete the story (the communication message) without the need of being told (self-communicative). That is a good arrangement is self-evident and self explanatory by nature.

What is visual communication?

“Visual communication of any kind, whether persuasive or informative, from billboards to birth announcements, should be seen as the embodiment of form and function: the integration of the beautiful and the useful. Copy, art and typography should be seen as living entity; each element integrally related, in harmony with the whole and the essential to the execution of an idea.

Like a juggler, the designer demonstrates his skills by manipulating these ingredients in a given space. Whether

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this space takes the form of advertisements, periodicals, books, printed forms, packages, industrial products, signs or television billboards, the criteria are the same” - **Paul Rand**

What is Typography?

“Typography is devoted to a clear purpose, which is to convey meaning through the use of type. It cannot be exempted from this obligation by any kind of argument or any other consideration. The printed product that cannot be read has no meaning whatsoever.

Emil Ruder, 1967



To design is to create an order, either from bottom to top or top to bottom, within a given constraint.

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Conclusion

Ideas and Thoughts:

As designers, our sole aim is to facilitate ease in communication for the viewer. Creating persuasive enquiry based approach to comprehend, sometimes a hidden visual order to lure the viewer or at times to guide him through a well-defined *Visual Order*.

Feeling and Reasoning:

The connect between design theory and application is difficult to grasp for a novice student of design, because the nature of design decisions are sometimes very subjective and contextual. Moreover, it becomes difficult, when the novice tries to seek rules or formulae to attempt solving of design problems. This does not necessarily mean that there are no rules in design. In fact, there are principles and concepts that need to be taught and internalized rather than rote learned. Design solutions are felt, experienced, compared and judged. They don't conclude as absolutes in themselves, because each time the context differs. The designer trains himself to respond to contexts, based on the knowledge acquired while learning principles of Visual Design.

Giving reason acts as a convenient approach, to teach a skill, explain knowledge or a concept. Rationality also gets well accepted and appreciated. To act without a reason, seems uncomfortable and paints a picture of being artistic, intuitive or subjective. Maybe that is why, quantitative results seem more pleasing compared to qualitative, since they are easily articulated by a rational mind.

Visual Order as a method will face arguments in its nature of explaining a concept through reference to analogies; but such is the case as most of these tasks (design problems) are related with concepts to be experienced; rather than being taught or told about. Most of these tasks are analogous; i.e., understood by doing, seeing and comparing and not based on results, translated numerically. Comparison provides insights, not results, as they are based on learning through perception. (Otl Aicher 1994).

Design assignments today, are currently under pressure to rationalize and at times, reason out acts as an incentive to make someone work towards a goal. It is difficult for sense of exploration to flourish within such environments, as exploration is based on a foundation of interests, rather than reasons. The method presented here attempts new approaches to strike a balance between both modes of thinking (vertical + lateral).

Considering the current context, where choice of font is available at a mouse click, the exercises in Visual order become extremely important as they act as rudimentary level courses in instilling the concept of Visual Order in the minds of novice designers, with the aim of making them familiar with the nature of design decisions. While encouraging students to have a sense of exploration towards tackling design problems, the instructors can also answer the rationale queries of students through the use of analogies. It is this marriage of exploration and rationale that *Visual Order* is trying to achieve.

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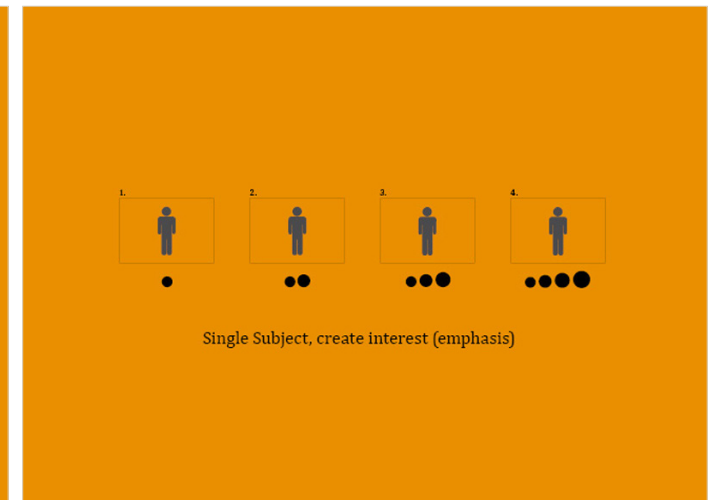
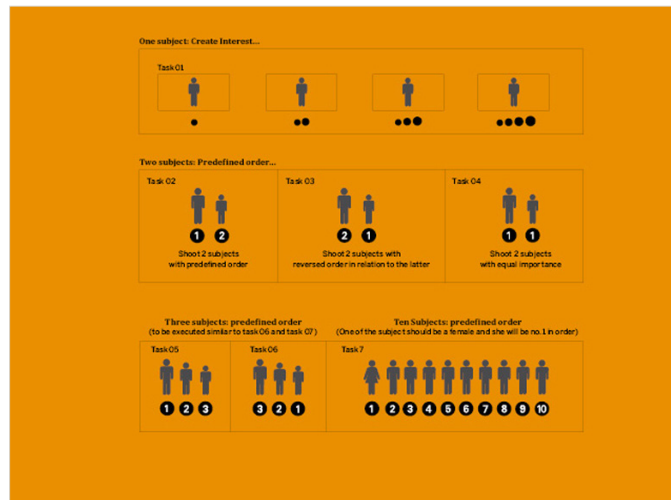
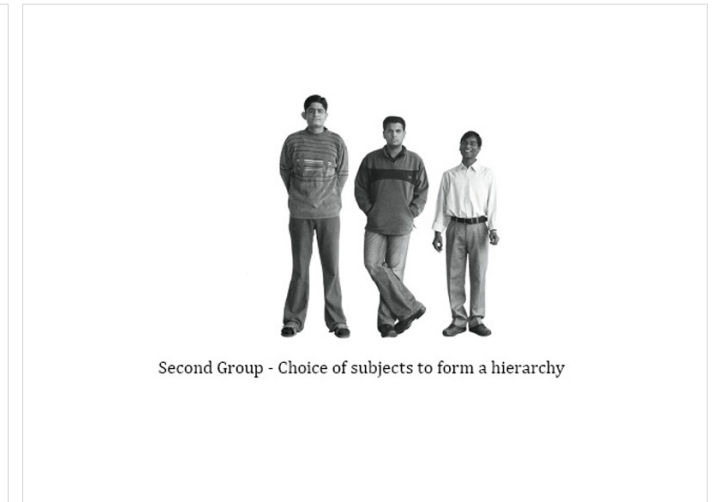
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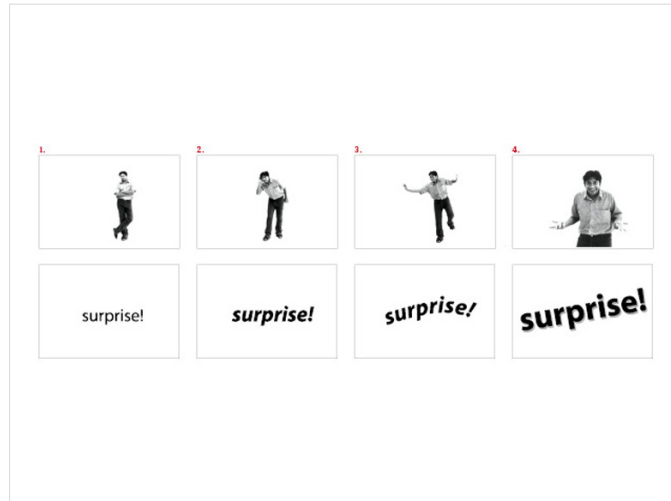
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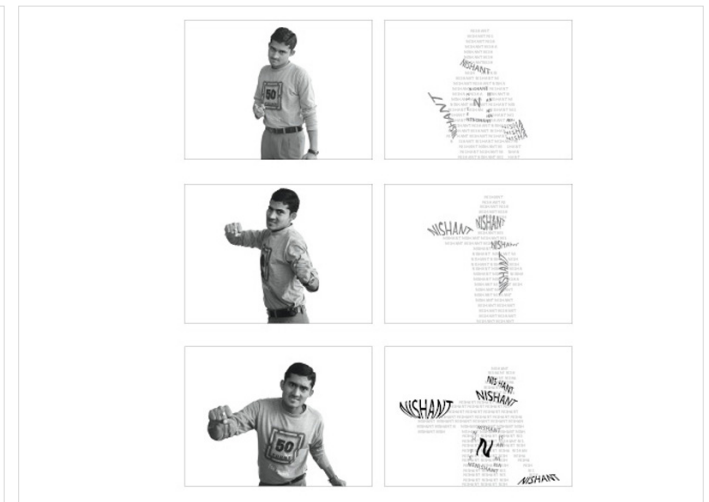
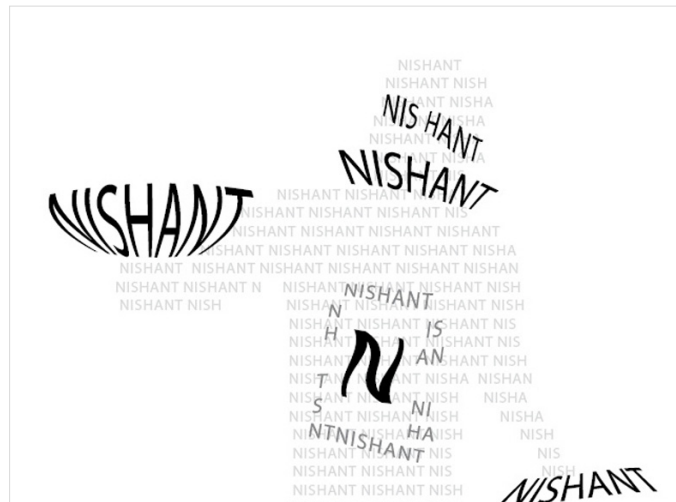
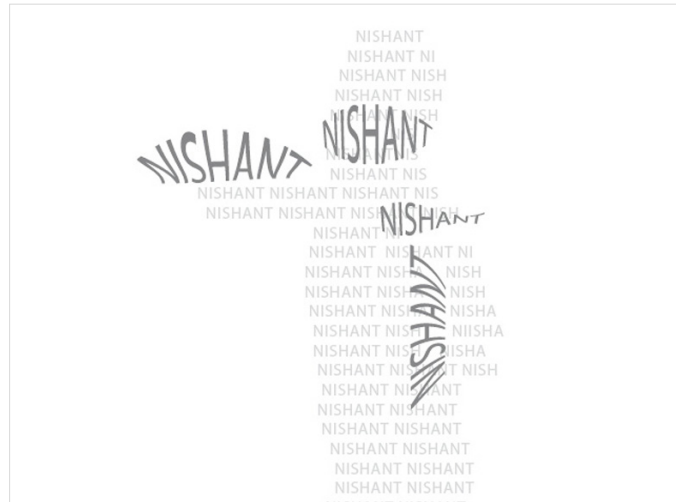
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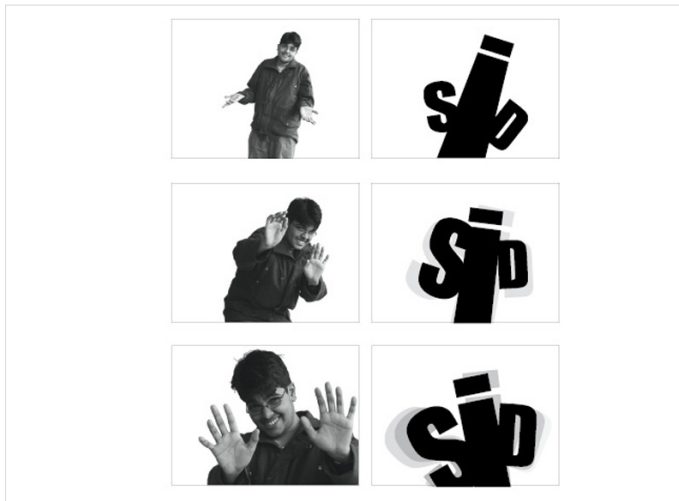
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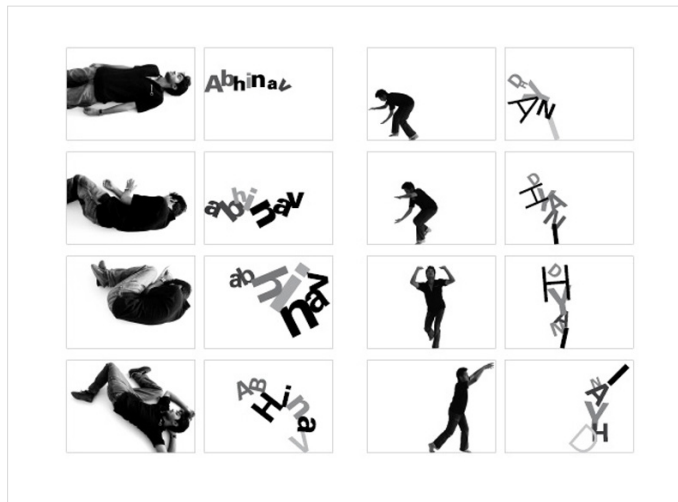
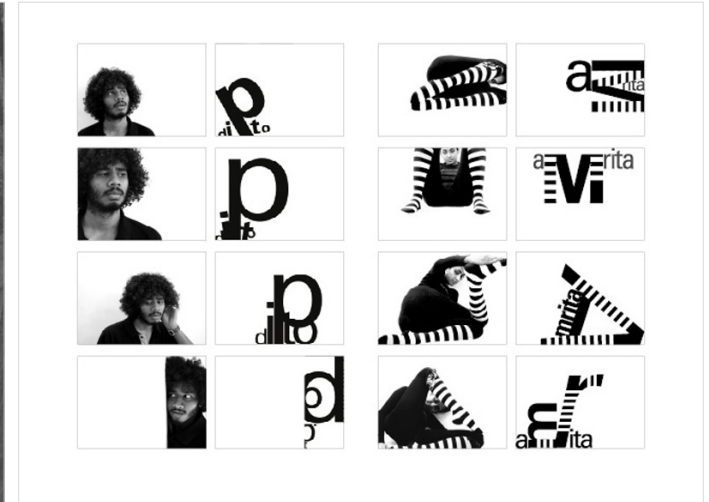
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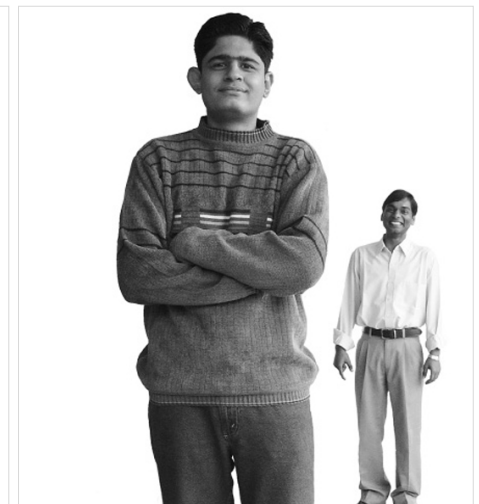
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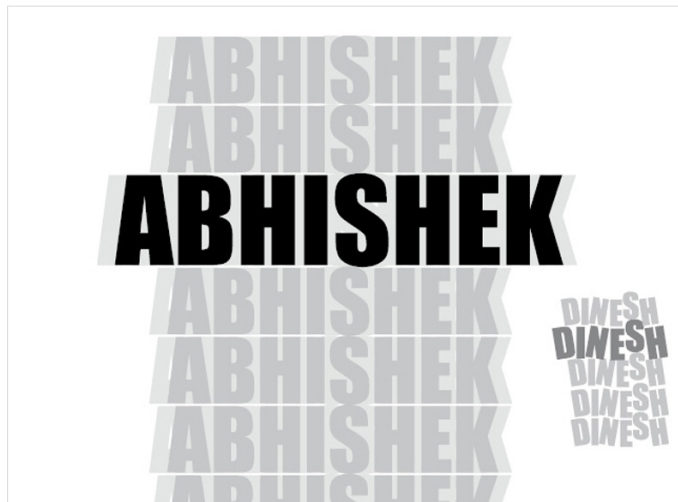
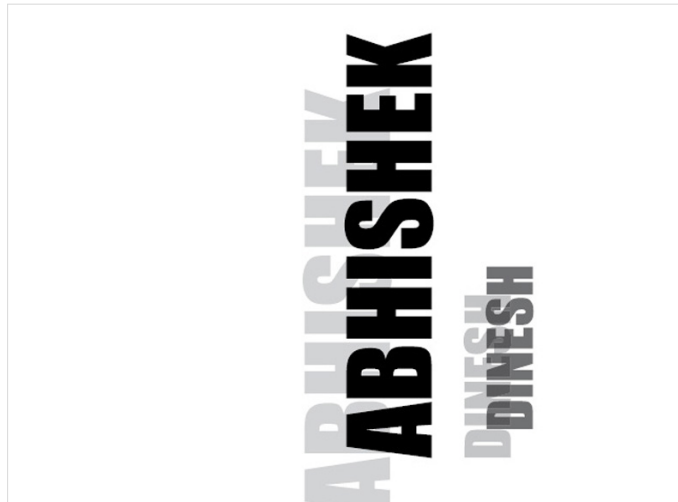
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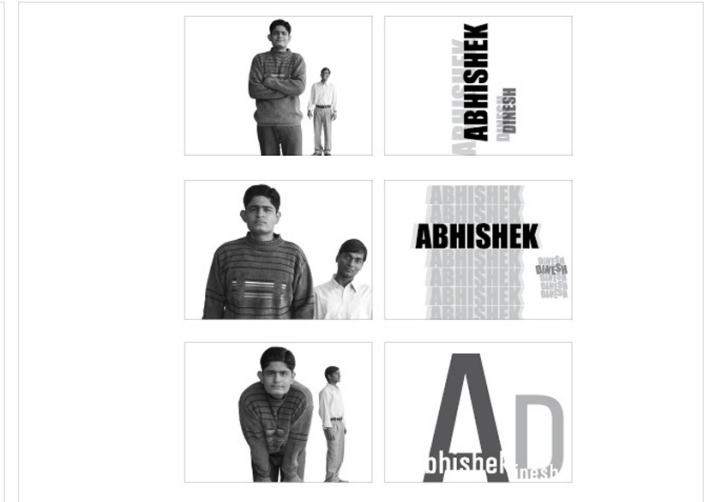
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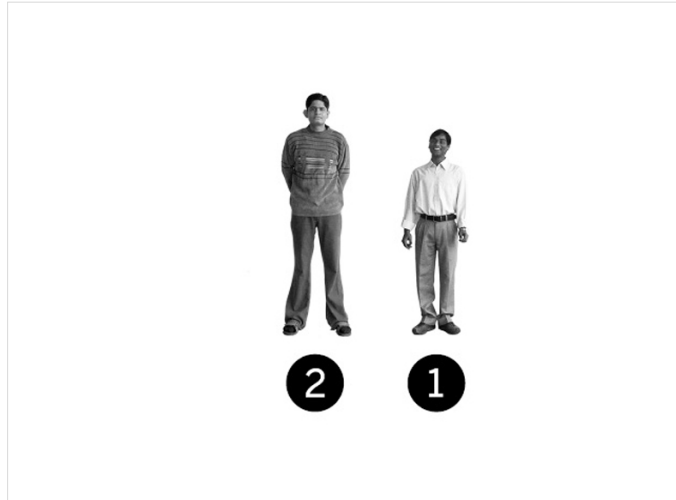
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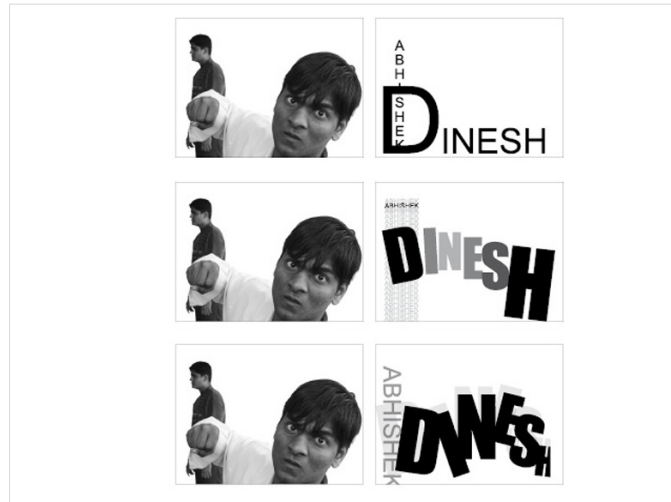
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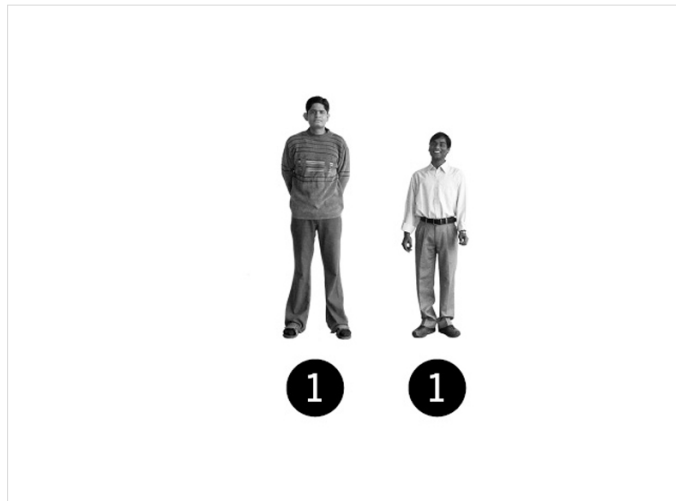
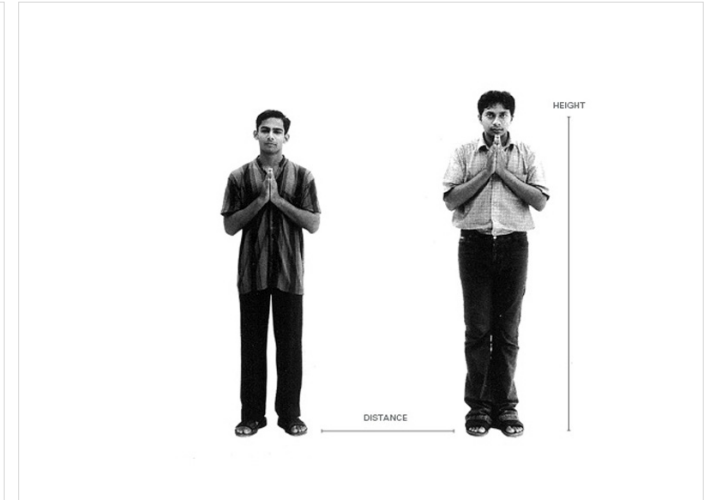
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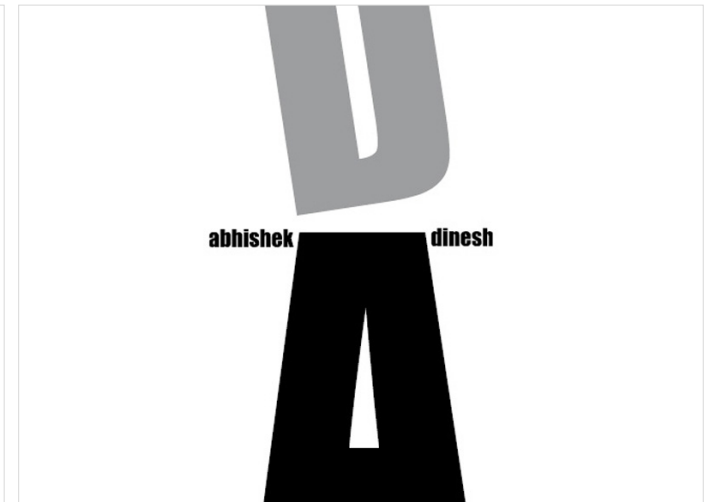
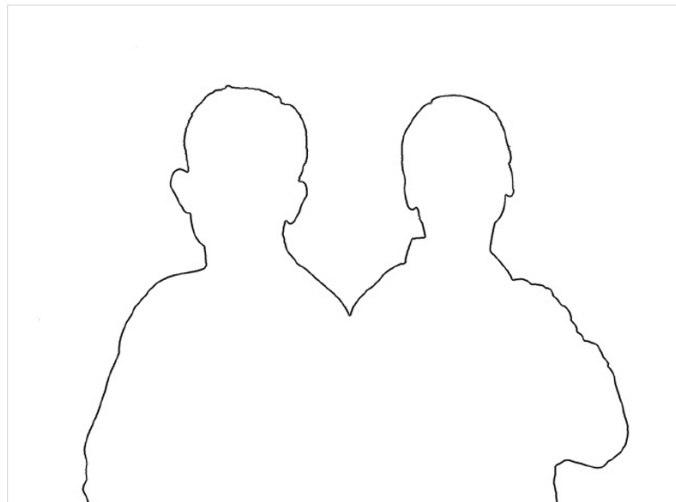
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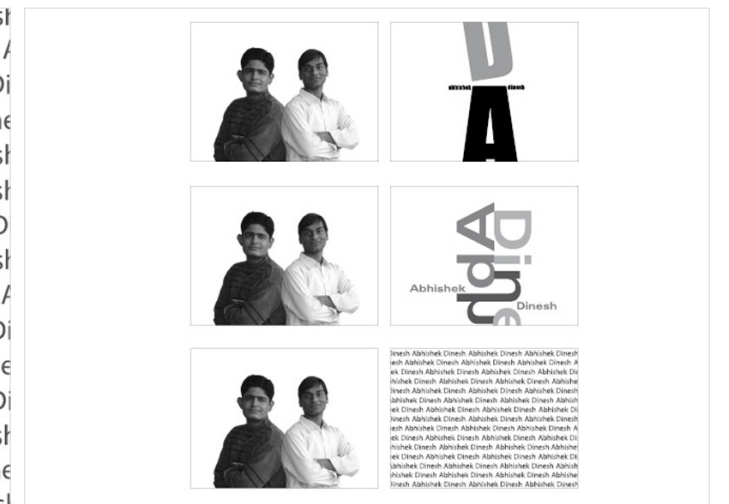
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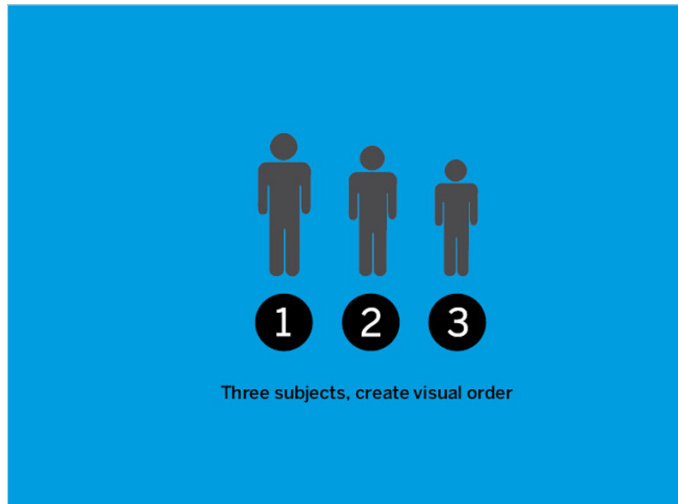
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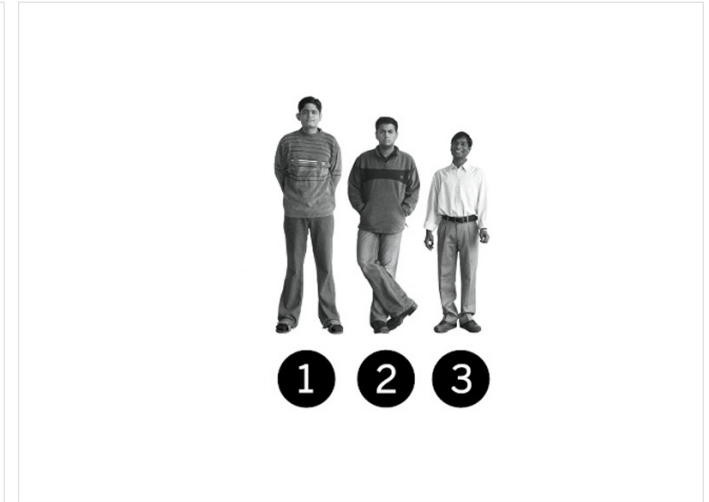
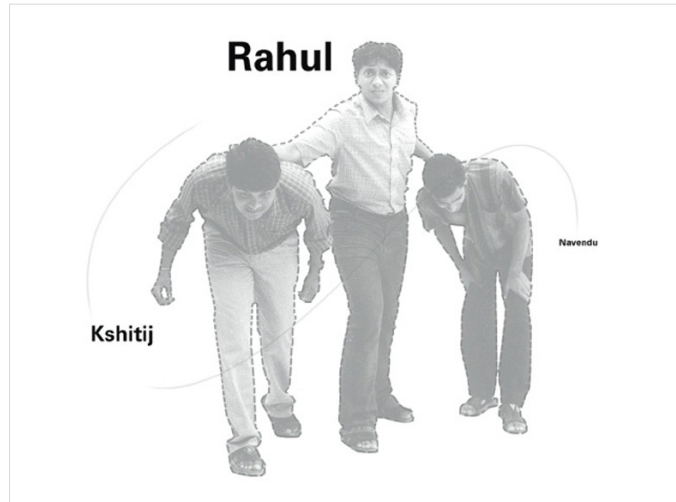
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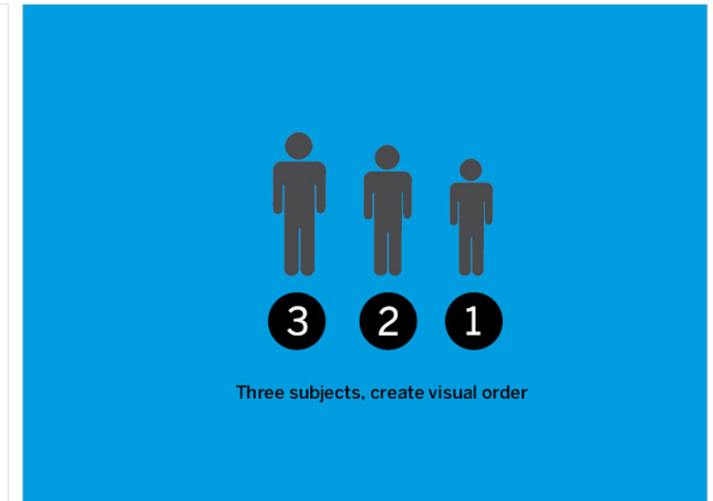
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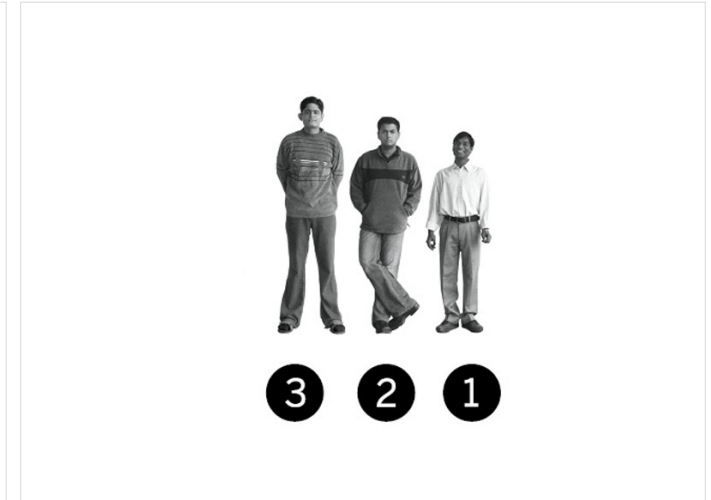
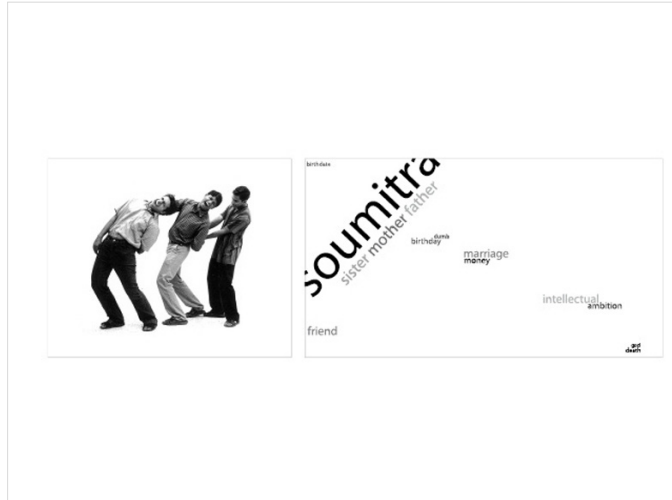
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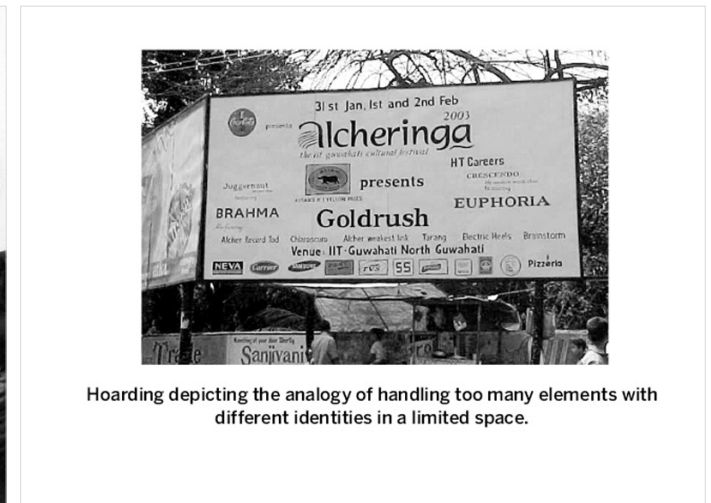
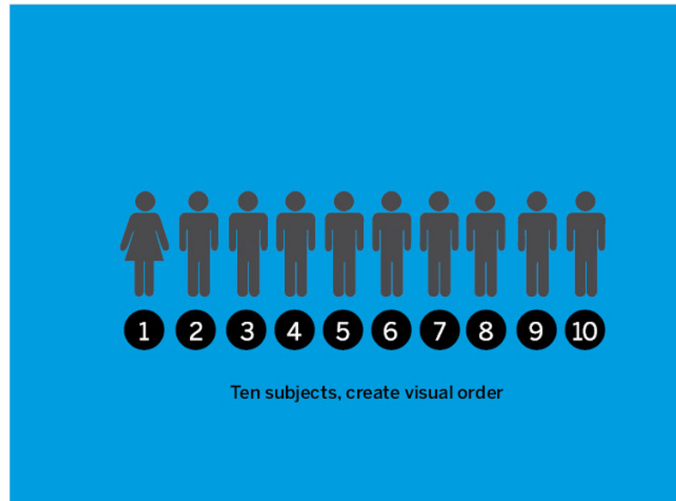
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Hoarding depicting the analogy of handling too many elements with different identities in a limited space.

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Design Course

Visual Order

Understanding of Visual Design Principles

by

Prof. Mandar Rane

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<https://www.dsource.in/course/visual-order/slide-show>

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In real life, we find examples of visual order. The boy in the picture decorates himself artificially to attract attention in the crowd of people. Similarly, a graphic designer highlights a single element (to catch attention first) in a composition; prior to your attention over other elements in the same composition (crowd).

200. Visual Order in our surroundings



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Contact Details

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